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ABSTRACT

Since 1988, education deregulation policies in the Netherlands have granted more autonomy to schools. This paper presents findings of a study that analyzed the changing role of school managers that has resulted from such policies. The study identified underlying values in the attitudes of school leaders toward their changing roles as managers of more autonomous schools. Data were obtained from interviews conducted with at least two school managers at eight Dutch primary schools and analysis of school documents. Findings show that school leaders cannot escape from their values while coping with the shift toward school autonomy. Administrators reported that tensions existed between being an educational professional and a chief executive; being in charge and being a member of the team; and feeling overloaded and being able to delegate tasks. One table is included. (Contains 11 references.) (LMI)

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Edith Hooge, Universiteit van Amsterdam, The Netherlands

VALUES, INCREASING AUTONOMY AND MANAGING THE PRIMARY SCHOOL

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1 Introduction

This paper focuses on the role of valuation in the process of increasing autonomy of schools. I will show that schoolleaders can not escape from values while coping with these changes and I will highlight some of these implicit or explicit values.

As McLaughlin notes, every action or choice of a schoolleader is value-laden: "Every aspect of the school (including its management, organisation and physical appearance) contain value assumptions and convey a message, whether explicitly of implicitly" (1994, p. 455). In order to understand what is hidden under the surface when autonomy of schools is increased, values should be taken into consideration (Lakomski 1987; Willower 1994).

Therefore, in my contribution, I will analyze the changing role and position of the schoolmanagement in terms of underlying values and convictions and moral choices. In order to do so, I re-examined the results of a comparative case study about the autonomy of Dutch primary schools, carried out in 1994, here. The central question is: Which values and convictions can be identified in the attitude of schoolleaders towards their changing role and position as a result of increasing autonomy of schools? The following aspects will be taken into consideration.

I The change in leadership role
II The tension between being in charge and being a member of the team
III The problem of delegation

The section below, section 2, contains information about the increasing autonomy of schools in The Netherlands. Section 3 presents in short the design of the present study and data collection. The last section, section 4, formulates an answer on the central question of this paper.

2 Increasing the autonomy of schools in The Netherlands

The autonomy of a school refers to its degree of self-government in relation to the degree of state intervention. To be able to pursue their own policy, schools need a certain discretion. The discretionary power schools have is here defined as being free from external compulsory rules (Van Esch, 1988, p. 79).

Internationally seen, Dutch (primary) schools have a large degree of autonomy (OECD, 1992, Education at a glance, p. 87). The so called freedom of education is reflected in schools' own choice of teaching materials and in the appointment of teachers.

However, in the 1980s there was a wave of criticism of the role of the state in general which also affected the educational field. The economical crisis gave rise to the question whether government intervention was cost-effective. The welfare state had not only become too expensive, but the pursued policy had also been opaque, complex and was accompanied by too many regulations. This new philosophy in public administration has also exerted an influence on the world of education. Since the mid-80s the policy of the central government stood in the light of deregulation. One of the most important elements of deregulation has been increasing the autonomy of schools.

At this point it should be stressed that we cannot simply assume that schools actually have obtained more autonomy as a result of that deregulation policy. We have analyzed the educational legislation and policy documents issued by the state since 1988[1]. On the basis of this analyzis we concluded that primary schools gained more discretionary power in financial and personnel issues, but experience more regulation and control pupil achievement and accountability[2]. Schoolboards, formally being the legal body, are the bearers of this increased autonomy. We have shown that the actual use of discretionary power is depending on the relationships between board and management.

3 Design and data collection

As Firestone (1993) suggests, the most useful generalizations in case study research are analytic, not 'sample-to-population'. In other words, the results of a case-study provide evidence which supports theory. For this reason, case-study research does not require random sampling, but 'reasoned' sampling. In this study the sampling strategy was to select critical cases. We have selected eight school by looking for variation in the original independent variable of the case study: the environment of the school.

In the first place, the data collection consisted of half-structured interviews with the schoolmanagement. At least two interviews were held in each school: one interview with the schoolleader an one with the deputy. The average duration of the interviews was 90 minutes. The interviews were recorded and literally written down. During the data collection descriptive and interpretative field notes were taken.

In the second place, we analyzed school documents, that is to say, we analyzed some reports covering educational, organizational and personnel policy, financial accounts, school newspapers, etc.

Based on the literal interview texts, on the results of the school document analyzis and on the field notes, eight case reports were written per school. These case reports were validated by the respondents. It is worth noting that schoolleaders and deputies could read each other's responses and comments. Although this procedure might cause ethical problems no prblems occurred so far. The corrections, nuances and comments made by the respondents were taken into account writing the second, definitive case reports.

The strategies used to analyze the data are discussed in greater detail by Miles & Huberman (1994).

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1 The reason for choosing the year 1988 is that in May 1988 the then secretary of State published a memorandum, known as "de nota 2000". Formally this is the first time that the State announces the deregulation policy made for primary schools. The main principle underlying the view presented in this document is that schools should acquire a greater degree of autonomy in the future.

2 The analysis of the educational legislation and policy documents is described in greater detail in the article: Hooge, E.H. (1994) Afzien van macht? De gevolgen van autonomievergroting voor de beleidsruimte van basisscholen. In: NTOR 2, juli 1994, p. 59 - 74.

4 Values and convictions underlying the attitude of schoolmanagers toward their changing role.

In this section we will carry out an explorative analyzis on the qualitative data. We will use theoretical insights and literal statements of the schoolleaders about their leadership and execution of tasks. Once more, our leading question was: Which values and convictions can be identified in the attitude of schoolleaders towards their changing role and position as a result of increasing autonomy of schools?

I The change in leadership role.

In general, schoolleaders claim to be educational professionals. However, they are administrators as well. Hughes (1985) proposes a dual role model which contains two closely interrelated aspects: the schoolleader as a chief executive and as as leading professional. As can be seen in many professionally staffed organizations, schoolleaders appointed have a strong professional background that is being good teachers. At this point the schoolleader can be seen as a "leading professional". The advantage of the schoolleader being a leading professional is the legitimation: representation by "one of their own kind" is more acceptable to teachers than by "someone viewed as an outsider".

The other aspect of the dual role schoolleaders take on is being "chief execute". He or she has allocative and co-ordinating functions within in the school and maintains relations with external bodies such as school boards and educational support institutions. As can be seen from our data schoolleaders perceive a change in their dual leadership role. In terms of Hughes, the past few years more importance is placed on their "chief execute" role.

Our data show that schoolleaders struggle with this change in leadership role. Some schoolleaders believe their previous training is the cause of this struggle. They learned to be good teachers, but have doubts about their motivation and skills for being a good leader:

> *"The last few years the schoolleader has become a manager. The requirements are changing, it is getting more complicated."*
>
> *"Schoolleaders are more and more responsable for "running their own shop". However, I wonder whether each schoolleader can handle this. You have to keep things going, planning, anticipating, budgeting, connecting staff policy to educatinal policy and so on. This requires a different outlook on managing your school."*
>
> *"We became kindergarten teacher, kindergarten haed teacher, teacher and now schoolleader. Sometimes they expect too much of you. For example at this moment I'm responsable for a rebuilding at this school: it costs loads of money!"*
>
> *"I think schoolleaders are becoming managers, they should have a more businesslike approach. However, originally, we have not been educated like that. When I chose my profession, I chose for the children and the classroom."*

The fear of loosing contact with educational praxis and the incapacity to leading the team has also been mentioned as a cause of this struggle with the change in leadership. In terms of Hughes schoolleaders who to take up the position of chief execute risk to loose legitimation:

" The managementtasks are very challenging, but I'm afraid of loosing contact with the practice. If you lead a team you have to know what "lives in teachers mind", what is going on in their daily work. You can make fantastic plans, you can have the best intentions, if your plan hasn't caught on well with them, you are on a road to nowhere."

In sum, it appears that motivation of schoolleaders plays a role whether or not they embrace the change in leadership role. To what extent does schoolleaders like it to be "chief execute"? If schoolleaders prefer to work directly with children, if they don't like "paper work", if the growing financial responsibility frightens them, they are not so eager to cope with the change in leadership. Motivation is strongly related to the image of what a schoolleader should do. Should a schoolleader "lumber" himself with other activities than activities directly related to the teaching and learning process?

What does the belief "that a good teacher automatically is a good schoolleader" mean? In terms of Hughes, it is the legitimation of a leading professional. However, since more accent is placed on the aspect of "the chief execute", this legitimation is under attack. The schoolleader can't identify himself anymore with the teachers and vice versa. According to some respondents this could negatively affect their leading capacities.
Other respondents don't share this belief. If more importancy is placed upon the "chief execute" role, why should the schoolleader be a professional i.g. a former teacher? On the contrary, in order to develop "a different outlook on schools" more management training should be required.

II The tension between being in charge and being a member of the team

Schools can be typified a professional bureaucracies (Mintzberg, 1979). In general, Dutch primary schools are small and have or few support staff. In 1990 the average size was 170 pupils, one third of the schools were attended by less than 125 pupils (Ax & van Wieringen 1991). In a professional bureaucracy authority is of professional nature instead of hierarchical nature. Primary schools have a highly democratic structure and no support staff. Primary schools claim to make decisions with the whole team: the schoolleader functions as a "primus inter pares".

However, since the deregulation policy mentioned in section 2 there are some changes. Primary schools grow larger as a result of national scale enlargement policy. Schoolleaders are confronted with growing responsibility. Taken these changes into account, schoolleaders wonder whether and how the hierarchical relations must change. Some schoolheads experience a tension between being in charge and being a member of the team:

"In order to maintain a good climate in our school, I should pretend there is no hierarchy. However, if I say "no" it should be clear that it is "no", because I have final responsibility. That is contradictory."

"The relation with collegues is a hierarchical one ... I mean ... you have to, it is the consequence of being a schoolleader. You are just better informed about things, supposed to keep things going. And however, even if you don't want to, they look up to you. I have worked here for fourteen years as a teacher untill I became deputy. Even the people who had known me very well started to treat me differently: you are in charge, you take decisions. I dislike that aspect of my work very much, that is why I don't want to be responsable for staff policy. In don't want to deal with this interrelational problems with collegues"

Should a schoolleader be on top of the hierarchy or remain "primus inter pares"? A few schoolleaders stated that, taken the consequences of growing autonomy and schaalvergroting into consideration, a schoolleader can't be a "primus inter pares" any more:

> *"Schoolleaders have to carry out their own staff policy nowadays. More and more they have to make decisions about gratifications, taskdifferentiation, and so on. A lot of schoolleaders still function as "primus inter pares" and I think in such a situation it is not possible to act authoritatively"*

What is more, schoolleaders turn from employees into employers. They are supposed to evaluate and assess teachers' functioning, to introduce a "bonus-system" by giving gratifications and so on. Again, the schoolleaders react differently:

> *"The schoolmanagement is turning from an employer to employee position. I wonder if they like such a position."*
>
> *"We are using the pupil monitoring system to evaluate teachers. Some teachers feel threatened and that's why we have a positive approach. I ask a teacher who is teaching very well to explain the whole team what his methods i.g. didactical approach is. So the others can learn from him."*
>
> *"Using the pupil monitoring system to evaluate techers? We would never do such a thing!"*
>
> *"I do classroom visits in order to show interest in the teacher and pupils, certainly not to asses teachers work".*
>
> *"If I have the possibility to pay good teachers extra, I will do it."*
>
> *"In my eyes a part of professionalizing is giving teachers gratifications."*
>
> *"Should I give bonuses to teachers who function well? Why? Aren't we all equal? I don't like to do that, I don't feel able to make such decisions!"*

These statements suggest that the wish of shared decision making competes with the aspiration to take final responsibility. These two ideals don't have to clash. However they sometimes do in the perception of the schoolleaders. Some schoolleaders consider it as negative and not democratic to place themselves above the team, others stress the importance of doing so. It seems as if primary schools are in a transition phase: they are turning from small organisations with a non-hierarchical structure into larger organisations with a more hierarchical structure. Competing values about democracy, efficiency, taking responsibility and shared decisionmaking are playing a role in this transition process. Illustrative at this point is in what extent schoolleaders embrace the fact that they can carry out their own staff policy. Should good teachers be rewarded by giving them a financial bonus, challenging tasks and in service training? Who should make such decisions, the schoolleader? Or is it altogether wrong to treat teachers differently?

III The problem of delegation.

There is a tendency among schoolleaders not to delegate their tasks to the team (Stoel 1994). This finding is remarkable in the sense that Stoel (1994) also found that schoolleaders hardly get round to their tasks of prime importance. Our data show that some

schoolleaders manage better than others to devote themselves to their tasks of prime importance. There seems to be a relation between feeling overloaded with work and not getting round and the measure of delegation by the schoolleader:

> *"I think a lot of schoolleaders burn out because you have to keep track of the outlines but you are constantly kept from work by daily concrete things such a phone call, a broken window, and so on."*
>
> *"I have to fight in order to dedicate my time to tasks of prime importance. In practice I'm executing tasks which should be done by others. Sometimes I feel like the odd-job man in the school."*
>
> *"Look, an independent team manages itself fine without the schoolleader. There are many things going on in this school from which I have not the faintest idea how it has been organized. The deputy is doing the financing so that is none of my business. There are many keys from which I don't know in which door they fit. I can concentrate on the essentials"*

The extent in which a schoolleader trust the team to execute delegated tasks properly determines whether they delegate or not:

> *"I'm always ready to pounce on something, everything has to be perfect. I tend to check up constantly. I also blaim myself for entering into details very often. I prefer to explain what has to be done and than leave it to others, but I keep on checking to avoid that my plans fail."*
>
> *"It is easy for me... I even prefer to delegate to my collegues because I consider them as professionals who are supposed to know what they are doing."*

The ideal of "we are all professionals, we are all equal" related to the originally non-hierarchical structure of primary schools mentioned before also exerts influence on the measure of delegation by the schoolleaders:

> *"People expect you to do many things which don't really belong to the work of a schoolleader. For example, organizing a school party, you shouldn't do it yourself being schoolleader. However, I find myself hanging up paper chains, because I don't want to place myself above my collegues."*

In order to devote themselves to their prime tasks schoolleaders should delegate more easily. However, some convictions are standing in the way to do so. First the schoolleaders believe in equity as if they and the teachers are all professionals. Therefore they find it normal to execute tasks which are, or could be, easily executed by the teachers: organizing extracurricular activities, decorating the school and so on. However, at the same time schoolleaders complain about the overload of work as a result of this "primus inter pares"-behavior.

Secondly, hidden behind this sense of equity, schoolleaders find it difficult to leave their tasks to others. The extent in which they trust the team to execute delegated tasks properly is affecting the degree of delegation.

In sum it appears that school heads consider it normal to execute teachers' tasks but find it hard to trust teachers executing their tasks. They maintain the image being a professional,

referring to the value of equity. In terms of trusting the team do execute their tasks properly they refer to the value of inequity and maintain their image of being a chief execute with final responsibility.

In this contribution I have highlighted some values and convictions affecting schoolleaders reactions to the process of increasing autonomy. Table 1 shows a short summary:

Attitude towards	**CONVICTION / VALUE**	**COMPETING CONVICTION / VALUE**
change in leadership style	♦ good teacher is good leader ♦ schoolleaders prime focus: the learning and teaching proces ♦ no legitimation if too much importance placed on chief-execute role	♦ good teacher not automatically good leader ♦ schoolleaders prime focus: allocating and coordinating ♦ no different outlook on the school if too much importance placed on leading professional role
hierarchy	♦ shared decision-making required because all professionals ♦ schoolleader is primus inter pares ♦ never treat teachers differently: they all do the best they can ♦ schoolleader has status of employee and could never carry out staff policy, school board is employer	♦ schoolleader is the decisive actor because has final responsibility ♦ schoolleader is in charge ♦ use staff policy instruments to reward good teachers ♦ schoolleader has status of employer and carries out staff policy as representative of the schoolboard
delegation	♦ schoolleader, equal to his collegues, has to execute the same daily tasks as they execute ♦ schoolleader, being more experienced than his collegues, executes his own tasks	♦ in order to concentrate on the essentials and avoid work overload, schoolleaders should not execute daily tasks teachers could easily do ♦ in order to concentrate on the essentials and avoid work overload, schoolleaders should reflect on which of their tasks they be delegated to the team

Table 1: Values and convictions playing a role in the attitude of schoolleaders towards their changing role and position as a result of increasing autonomy of schools

As Willower (1994, p. 479) notes there are no pregiven, fixed solutions of the dilemmas outlined above. Contexts, contingencies and consequences should be taken into consideration. In order to do 'the right thing,' schoolleaders have to analyze systematically the consequence of their choices. Theory about educational administration and school organisation can be helpfull.

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